

In Defense of Hadith Method

Abdullah Moataz



The Sunni Defense



Islamic Discourse Initiative



In memory of Kheireddine Bouzid, my friend and older brother, with whom I began my journey in the field of hadith, but passed away before seeing the fruits of our study. May Allah shower you with mercy!

Introduction

Bismillah!

Allah blessed our *Muhammadi* nation by perfecting our religion for all times, places and people, making it then universal for all of creation and completing the tradition of prophecy with our Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This decree of Allah necessitated the accurate preservation and transmission of our religion and its texts throughout the ages. Allah - in his perfect wisdom - did preserve it, yet He utilized the intelligence and abilities of our Nation, as opposed to preserving it in a divine or extraordinary manner. This is from Allah's mercy to our Nation, as not only was the faith preserved and protected for all times, but since it was done through the work of the Nation, it allowed them to reap the divine rewards for their endeavors in the next life.

From the finest minds of our Nation, the Hadith Method was developed, which I would argue is the most important intellectual contribution and central discipline of our faith. Due to the central nature of Hadith Method to our faith, it has always been the subject of relentless attacks of its detractors. They attempt to show this method of ours isn't suitable for the task of authentication, due to its subjectivity and arbitrary application, thereby exposing their own ignorance on the subject.

The goal of this very brief eBook is twofold. Firstly, to defend the Hadith Method from its detractors and in the process, perhaps upon up some of their eyes to information they may not have been privy to previously. Secondly, it will serve as means to educate the Muslims on this topic which has certainly not been given justice to and in the process strengthen their certainty in hadith literature - our second most important source of Islamic legislation and the most important sources we have on the Prophet's life and example.

The chapters follow a logical progression. The first chapter starts by acknowledging the occurrence of mistakes in *Al-Jarh wal Ta'dil*, all the while discussing the frequency and the scope of the mistakes. The second chapter progresses by surveying two methods used by hadith critics in judging transmitters and demonstrating the rationale behind it. The third chapter seeks to prove the objectivity of the hadith critics. The fourth and last chapter shows the sincerity and honesty of the hadith critics, who put the integrity of the field before all else.

It should be noted that this is a mere glimpse into the Method and that this eBook is summarized from my larger work on the topic which has yet to be completed, entitled, "Hadith Method: Defense and Establishment." Perhaps it will interest some others in getting involved in hadith!

I ask Allah to benefit myself and others thru this brief work!

Abdullah Moataz

Chapter Title	Page
Chapter One: The Recognition of Bias	4
Section A - Theory	4
Section B - Application	5
Chapter Two: Methods in Judging Transmitters	8
Chapter Three: The Objectivity of the Hadith Critics	13
Section A - Hadith Critics and Their Theological Opponents	14
Yahya b. Ma'in and Shi'i Transmitters	14
Yahya b. Ma'in and Qadari Transmitters	15
Section B - Hadith Critics and Transmitters of their Persuasion	16
Section C - Hadith Critics and Hadith in Support of their Biases	19
Chapter Four: Sincerity and Honesty of Hadith Critics	22
Section A - First Practice	23
Section B - Second Practice	25
Conclusion	27

Chapter One: The Recognition of Bias

In any discussion, it is of utmost importance to pinpoint the actual area of contention between the various parties involved. What is it that we are actually debating? Where does our actual disagreement start at? A debate on the veracity of Hadith method is no different; we must highlight where our disagreement lies. For many detractors of Hadith Method, they focus on the hadith critics themselves and seek to draw conclusions from the very fact they are human and those prone to error, a point about which there is no disagreement. Because much of Hadith Method relates to pinpointing errors of transmitters, and subsequently either endorsing their reliability or criticizing their inaccuracies, known as *Al-Jarh wal Ta'dil*, the detractors of Hadith Method point out that these criticisms and endorsements cannot be taken at face value because of the various biases that hadith critics are subject to. But it is *not* our claim that hadith critics were perfect or that they would never fall prey to their personal biases and grudges. Our claim is that mistakes due to personal grudges - for example - did occur, yet they were the exception and not the rule and at that, the earliest hadith critics were aware of this.

Section A - Theory

In theory, the hadith critics did recognize the problem of bias and were acutely aware of the possibility of its occurrence. For instance, Yahya b. Ma'in recognized this when discussing Abu Nu'aym's criticisms of others. Ibn Al-Junayd writes:

I heard Yahya b. Ma'in say: "Abu Nu'aym, if he mentions a person and says, 'He is good,' and praises him, then he must be a Shi'ite. And if

he calls a person a Murji', then he must be orthodox, nothing wrong with him."¹

In this quote, Yahya is pointing out that, due to certain theological leanings of Abu Nu'aym, he was prone to describe transmitters with theological labels that may be less than accurate in the eyes of Yahya.

Another important quote on this topic that shows early hadith critics understood the problem of biased criticism is a quote by Abu Zur'ah Al-Razi (d. 264). Al-Bardha'i quotes Abu Zur'ah as saying:

"Anyone who doesn't speak about this field religiously, they throw themselves into destruction. Anyone who has a problem or calamity between them and another, it is possible for them to mention it. Though Al-Thawri and Malik used to critique transmitters religiously, hence their opinions were acted upon. Whoever doesn't speak in this discipline religiously, it will come back to [haunt] them."²

In this quote from Abu Zur'ah, he is warning others from falling into the pitfall of unfair criticism against hadith transmitters and implicitly accepts the fact that it occurs, then pointing out that Al-Thawri and Malik were generally safe from prejudice, hence the popularity of their rulings.

Section B - Application

In terms of practical examples where hadith critics reject a criticism against another transmitter due to biases of those involved, there are several. For example, while questioning Al-Hakim (d. 405), Al-Sijzi writes:

¹ Su'alat Ibn Al-Junayd (469)

² Su'alat Al-Bardha'i (2/329)

And I asked him (i.e. Al-Hakim) about Ibrahim b. 'Abdillah Al-Sa'diy, so he said, "He is reliable and trusted though he used to belittle Muslim b. Al-Hajjaj, and thus Muslim impeached him without justification."³

Al-Hakim attributes the motivation behind Muslim's criticism of Al-Sa'diy to a personal problem between the two and ends by declaring it to be unjustified.

In the following quote from Abu Ya'la Al-Khalili (d. 446), he attributes Al-Nassa'i's criticism of a transmitter to be based on a form of prejudice against him and declares that it is unacceptable. He writes:

"Ahmed b. Salih Al-Misri: a reliable (*thiqah*) Authority (*Hafiz*). Al-Bukhari recorded from him, and Muhammad b. Yahya Al-Dhuhli wrote from him, as did Abu Zur'ah and Abu Hatim. Abu 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Nasa'i criticized him, but the authorities (*Huffaz*) agreed that his criticism is prejudice, and the criticism from his likes (i.e. Al-Nassa'i) doesn't harm him."⁴

In the last quote, it shows Al-Hakim wondering if Yahya b. Sa'id criticisms against a particular transmitter were justified or not. Al-Hakim reported that he asked Al-Daraqutni:

"I (i.e. Al-Hakim) said: Ibrahim b. Al-Muhajir? He (i.e. Al-Daraqutni) replied: They weakened him; Yahya Al-Qattan and others criticized him. I said: Rightfully so? He said: Of course! He transmitted hadith reports that he hasn't been corroborated on. Shu'bah also criticized him."⁵

³ Su'alat Al-Sijzi Lil Hakim (82)

⁴ Al-Irshad fi Ma'rifat 'Ulama' Al-Hadith (1/424)

⁵ Su'alat Al-Hakim Lil Daraqutni (180)

No quote will better summarize what preceded than Al-Dhahabi's words on the topic in his *Siyar A'lam Al-Nubala'*. He says, "We don't claim infallibility for the authorities of *Jarh Wal-Ta'dil*, but they are the most accurate, least prone to mistakes, most fair and the furthest from prejudice."⁶

⁶ *Siyar A'lam Al-Nubala'* (11/82)

Chapter Two: Methods in Judging Transmitters

The methods of judging transmitters and determining their reliability are diverse and the final judgment on a given transmitter is usually the result of applying several of these methods to the transmitter and not sufficing with only one method. This diversity in application lends the results a great deal of credibility. When multiple methods lead us to believe a transmitter is reliable, it probably means we are on to something. The opposite applies as well; when multiple methods lead us to believe a transmitter to be dishonest or unreliable, we should be confident in these results.

For the purpose of this book, we will only survey two of these methods. Before we do that, the reader should note that the implications of these methods differ. For some methods, the results would be indicative of honesty but nothing else. For other methods, the results would indicate accurate retention and precision as well as honesty by implication

The first method used by hadith critics in determining the reliability is the cross-examination of a transmitter's transmission to that of others. A collection of all or most of a certain transmitter's transmission may be termed as a "pool of transmission." A hadith critic would choose a specific transmitter and begin cross-examining the transmitter's pool of transmission to what others transmit. What the hadith critic looks for is, in effect, how this particular transmitter's pool of transmission interacts with other pools of transmission. Is the pool of transmission consistent with other pools of transmission? Does this particular pool of transmission contain much unique transmission, exclusive to it, to the exclusion of others? Or worse yet, does this specific pool of transmission contradict other pools of transmission? The hadith critics will even look at a specific

pool of transmission and observe how the transmission contained therein to interact with each other. Is the transmission contained in this particular pool consistent with each other? Or are their inconsistencies contained therein? If it can be shown that there is a level of corroboration, such that the pool of transmission in question is in agreement with its sister pools on the common transmission between them and the pool is internally intact from inconsistencies, this is a clear indication that the transmitter responsible for this pool of transmission is both accurate in their retention and honest in their transmission.

What preceded isn't an ad hoc explanation of the rulings by early hadith critics, where modern ideas of authenticity are projected on unclear practices or ambiguous quotes by early scholars. On the contrary, these ideas are found expressly in the words as well as practices of the early hadith critics.

Al-Shafi'i (d. 204) said while explaining the prerequisites to accepting the reliability of a transmitter, "If he participates in the transmission of a hadith along with those of accurate retention (*ahl al-hifz*), it [should] match their transmission."⁷ Al-Shafi'i isn't alone in this theory. In fact Muslim b. Al-Hajjaj (d. 261), one of the most famous hadith critics and compilers of hadith said, "He participates along with reliable transmitters, those of knowledge and retention, [in transmitting] a portion of what they transmit and [in doing so] is predominantly in agreement."⁸ Thus it is clear that this meaning was understood by early critics, at least in theory.

In practice, the application of this theory can be observed with clarity. For example, Ahmed b. Hanbal (d. 241) relayed that, "Yahya b. Sa'id was skeptical of Hammam until Mu'adh b. Hisham arrived and corroborated

⁷ Al-Risalah (371)

⁸ Sahih Muslim (10)

Hammad in his transmission.⁹ Yahya b. Sa'id was suspicious of Hammam, due to what he presumed to be an undue amount of unique transmission exclusively transmitted by Hammam. It was only after Yahya b. Sa'id realized that, in fact, these particular reports were corroborated by Mu'adh b. Hisham and not really exclusive to Hammam did he relent.

Similarly, Yahya bin Ma'in, the famous hadith critic of the late second and early third century of Islam relates an incident that occurred between him and Ibn 'Ulayyah, a well-known Hadith transmitter. Ibn 'Ulayyah came to him, inquiring about Yahya's opinion on his level of accuracy in transmitting Hadith.¹⁰ When Yahya replied, confirming Ibn 'Ulayyah's precision in Hadith transmission, Ibn 'Ulayyah prodded Yahya further, asking, "How did you know that?" Ibn Ma'in explained, "We compared it to the reports of others, and we found it accurate."¹¹ Here, Ibn Ma'in is justifying his endorsement of Ibn 'Ulayyah's reliability by the cross-examination that he did.

When it comes to the internal consistency of a transmitter's pool of transmission, Al-Tirmidhi writes:

It is mentioned of Yahya bin Sa'id that if he were to see a person transmitting [an account] from his memory, once like this, and once like that, not remaining consistent on one version, he would abandon him.¹²

It is clear from this quote that Yahya b. Sa'id was worried about how consistent a transmitter was in their transmission. If the transmitter didn't remain consistent, he would reject him as a transmitter. Internal inconsistency is a sign that the transmitter has not accurately and precisely retained the information they are reporting.

⁹ Al-'Ilal wa Ma'rifah Al-Rijal li Ahmed - Riwayah Al-Marrudhi wa Ghayrih (43)

¹⁰ As my brother commented, "This is the ancient equivalent of googling your own name."

¹¹ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Ibn Muhriz (2/39)

¹² Sharh 'Ilal Al-Tirmidhi (1/104)

The second method requires examination of a transmitter's pool of transmission, but instead of looking for how the pool of transmission interacts with itself and other pools, the hadith critics look for other types of indicators which may be termed as: transparent practices in transmission. When found, this type of indicator alludes to both the honesty as well as the accuracy and precision of the transmitter. What are these transparent practices in the transmission? It is any practice where the transmitter exerted more effort, to be honest, and precise, even though had they not been so honest, they may have been able to get away with it. Since this is a bit theoretical at the moment, let's consider a scenario.

Let's say transmitter A used to constantly attend a weekly gathering of hadith where he would learn from his teacher B ten hadith reports. After several months of regular attendance, transmitter A missed the weekly gathering, thereby missing ten hadith. So as to not lose the benefit, he went to two of his classmates C and D on a separate occasion and each transmitted half of the hadith he missed from that session (five hadith from each). When it comes time to transmit, transmitter A has several hundred reports that he directly took from teacher B, but is stuck with the ten hadith that he missed, five of which he heard from his classmate C and the other five which he heard from classmate D. What does transmitter A do in this case? If he wanted to, he probably could get away with dishonestly transmitting the ten hadith he missed, directly from his teacher B, and none would be the wiser since he was known to regularly attend the gathering. On the other hand, if he is both honest and precise, he will make a clear distinction between the several hundred hadith he heard directly from his teacher B versus the ten hadith he learned from his classmates C and D, who in turn had taken it from their mutual teacher B. If he does this, it shows honesty, since he could have gotten away with dishonestly dropping his classmates from the chain yet did not and it shows precision since he is able to distinguish between the reports which

he heard directly from his teacher B as opposed to the reports he heard from his classmates C and D who took them from teacher B.

As was the case with the other method, this reasoning is found among the early hadith critics, and they readily use it when judging transmitters. For example, Ibn 'Adiyy (d. 365) writes about Suhail b. Abi Salih:

Suhail transmits from a number of people from his father¹³, and this shows the reliability of the man. Suhail transmits from Sumay from Abu Salih; Suhail transmits from Al-A'mash from Abu Salih; Suhail transmits from Abdullah b. Muqsim from Abu Salih. This shows the discernment of the man and [his ability to] discern what he [directly] heard from his father without any intermediary between them, and what he heard from Sumay and Al-A'mash and authorities other than them.¹⁴

In this passage, Ibn 'Adiyy is impressed with Suhail b. Abi Salih due to his precision. Firstly, Suhail is admitting that he didn't hear a certain amount of hadith from his father, even though he could have easily gotten away with dishonestly transmitting had his personal integrity not stopped him. Secondly, he is able to distinguish between multiple things:

1. What he heard directly from his father
2. What he took indirectly from his father through Sumay
3. What he took indirectly from his father through Al-A'mash, etc.

The theoretical scenario presented first and then the practical scenario presented secondly are not the only types of scenarios that would fall under transparent practices in transmission.

¹³ His father being: Abu Salih.

¹⁴ Al-Kamil (4/526)

Chapter Three: The Objectivity of the Hadith Critics

Objectivity in analyzing hadith and determining its authenticity means to study the hadith historically and judge according to the evidence surrounding each hadith; irrespective of the Critic's personal biases and opinions. Establishing the objectivity and impartiality of the Hadith Critics is crucial in defending the Hadith Method. If they were not objective, their rulings would be arbitrary and thus, without value. How could Hadith Method be suitable to sift through transmission if it is not practiced objectively?

As Sunnis, the objectivity of the Hadith Critics is taken for granted; a fact that needs no further research, hence if questioned about the justification for this position, some may falter even though there is ample reason to believe so. For this, the reason why it is taken for granted is not simply the result of Sunni dogma, but because it is quite apparent to whoever looks at the information impartially.

The objective application of Hadith Method by Hadith Critics is exhibited through many examples and practices. I have chosen to only highlight three scenarios where their impartiality is most obvious.

In the first scenario (Section A), we look at how Hadith Critics dealt with their theological opponents.

In the second scenario (Section B), we look at how Hadith Critics dealt with some of those who shared their theological stances.

In the third scenario (Section C), we look at how Hadith Critics dealt with hadith reports that expressly support their theological biases.

These three scenarios were chosen, because they are contentious scenarios where true objectivity is tested. It is not hard for a person who has nothing at stake in an issue to be objective, but true objectivity is noted when a person must take a stand between personal bias and principle. Will a Critic undermine a reliable transmitter from a competing theological school? Will a Critic overlook the weakness of a transmitter who happens to be from his own theological persuasion? Will a Critic overlook impairing defects in hadith simply because it supports his own theological persuasion?

Section A - Hadith Critics and Their Theological Opponents

Yahya b. Ma'in (d. 233) is one of the most famous and influential Hadith Critics who spoke extensively on hadith transmitters, criticizing and endorsing them. Due to this, I have chosen to use his rulings as a lens by which the objectivity of hadith critics may be observed in applying the hadith method to a critic's theological opponents. Yet, the objectivity exhibited by Yahya here is not exclusive to him, but can also be observed in the writings of many other Hadith Critics in the formative era of hadith transmission and Criticism. In my original work, I give dozens of similar examples from Ahmed b. Hanbal, the two Razis (Abu Zur'ah and Abu Hatim) and Al-Jawzajani.

Yahya b. Ma'in and Shi'i Transmitters

When it comes to the superiority of the companions and the proper order they fall into, Yahya was very clear about his opinion. Yahya said, "And I

say: Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali. This is our opinion and view.¹⁵" Furthermore, Yahya considered anyone who preferred 'Ali over 'Uthman to be a Shi'i¹⁶. From this, it is clear that the Shi'a are clearly in opposition to Yahya. The question that asks itself: How then does Yahya deal with their transmitters? Does he let his theological biases get the best of him? Or does he objectively rate them, irrespective of the differences?

In theory Yahya b. Ma'in admits that Shi'i transmitters can be reliable. He said, "A Shi'i can be reliable."¹⁷ This theory is further supported by Yahya's practice. Let us consider the following quotes from Yahya b. Ma'in.

1. Yahya said, "Fatr b. Khalifah is reliable (*thiqah*) and he is a Shi'i."¹⁸
2. Yahya said, "Muhammad b. Kathir Al-Kufi transmits from Layth. He was a Shi'i and there was nothing wrong with him (*Lam yakun bihi ba's*)."¹⁹
3. Ibn Al-Junayd said: I asked Yahya b. Ma'in about Sa'id b. Khuthaym Al-Hilali and he said, "He is a Kufan Shaykh, there is nothing wrong with him (*Laysa bihi ba's*), reliable (*thiqah*)."²⁰ A man then said to Yahya, "He is Shi'i"²⁰?" He said, "A Shi'i can be reliable and a Qadari can be reliable."²¹

Yahya b. Ma'in and Qadari Transmitters

Another group Yahya was diametrically opposed to was the Qadariyyah. Yahya said, "I don't pray behind a Qadari if he proselytizes."²² He also used to say that if a person has no other choice but to pray behind a Qadari,

¹⁵ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (3/465)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Su'alat Ibn Al-Junayd (421)

¹⁸ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (3/333)

¹⁹ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (3/478)

²⁰ This can either be understood as a question or an objection. My assumption is that it was an objection, hence explaining Yahya's reply to the man.

²¹ Su'alat Ibn Al-Junayd (421)

²² Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (3/466)

he should redo his prayers²³. Clearly, Yahya is opposed to this group, refusing to pray behind them, and commanding others to do so as well, something he didn't practice with Shi'ah. Yet this didn't prevent Yahya from impartially rating Qadari transmitters.

In theory, Yahya admits that a "Qadari can be reliable."²⁴ As was the case with the Shi'i transmitters, Yahya's theory is supported and backed by his practice. Let us consider the following quotes from Yahya b. Ma'in.

1. Yahya b. Ma'in said, "Abdul-Hamid b. Ja'far, there is nothing wrong with him (*Laysa bihi ba's*) and he was a Qadari."²⁵
2. Yahya b. Ma'in said, "Muhammad b. Rashid is reliable (*thiqah*) and he was a Qadari."²⁶
3. Yahya b. Ma'in said about Abu Qatn, "There was nothing wrong with him (*Lam yakun bihi ba's*), but he used to speak about Qadr; he was truthful (*Saduq*)."²⁷

In the preceding examples, we observed Yahya b. Ma'in objectively looking and rating the transmitters, even though, as we showed, they belonged to two opposing theological groups (Shi'ah and Qadariyyah), some of which he was particularly harsh about. What truly mattered to Yahya, in his capacity as a Hadith Critic, was the transmitter's ability to honestly and accurately retain and subsequently reproduce transmission, and not their theological leanings or heresies.

Section B - Hadith Critics and Transmitters of their Persuasion

²³ Su'alat Ibn Al-Junayd (466)

²⁴ Su'alat Ibn Al-Junayd (421)

²⁵ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (3/190)

²⁶ Min Kalam Abi Zakariyya Yahya b. Ma'in fi Al-Rijal (36)

²⁷ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Ibn Muhriz (1/81)

Another important angle to look at this issue from is to see how Hadith Critics dealt with their own kind; those who were of the same theological leanings and orientation as them. Were they allowed to get away with forgery? Was their weakness ignored for the sake of the shared theology between the Critic and the transmitter?

Al-Jawzjani (d. 259) was a hadith critic who has a reputation of being strict, as well as being a theological bigot of sorts. In his book "*Ahwal Al-Rijal*" he makes several points on the subject. Besides showing that not all heretics are liars, but some are actually honest, he points out that there are some forgers who were not known to him for heresy, though he notes "lying is a sufficient heresy²⁸." This is an important quote, as it shows that *in theory* even someone who has a reputation for being a theological bigot and very strict was not willing to give those who may have the same theological orientation as him a free pass.

This theory is backed up in practice by Hadith Critics, who did criticize their theological brethren as needed.

Let's take a look at Kharijah b. Mus'ab b. Kharijah. He was important enough of a figure to be quoted by Al-Bukhari in his "*Khalq Af'al Al-'Ibad*" excommunicating the *Jahmiyyah*, and detailing the ways in which they disbelieved²⁹. Yet Al-Bukhari himself wrote about him:

Yahya b. Yahya said, "He used to deceptively transmit (*yudallis*) from Ghiyath b. Ibrahim." Ghiyath b. Ibrahim's hadith was lost, and thus his authentic transmission is not known from his inauthentic transmission.³⁰

²⁸ Ahwal Al-Rijal (11)

²⁹ Khalq Af'al Al-'Ibad (2/20)

³⁰ Tahdhib Al-Kamal (8/20)

While Al-Bukhari certainly doesn't believe him to be a liar or dishonest, on the same token doesn't believe his transmission to be entirely acceptable. Others, including Abu Hatim Al-Razi, Al-Daraqutni both of whom are equally in agreement with his theology, criticize him expressly³¹.

Another transmitter known for his tough theological stances, in agreement with Ahl Al-hadith was Nu'aym b. Hammad Al-Khuza'i. His unwavering theological stances earned him a place in the prisons of the *mihna*, from which he inevitably passed away. Clearly, his stances earned him the admiration of many Hadith Critics, who either suffered as he did, or held the same unwavering theological stances. It is not surprising then when one finds much praise of him. At the same time, there is an express criticism of him, and many examples of his mistakes and objectionable reports. Abu Dawud said about him, "Nu'aym b. Hammad has about 20 hadith from the Prophet that is baseless."³² Salih Jazarah said, "Nu'aym used to transmit from his memory and he has many objectionable reports that no one corroborates him on."³³ Salih Jazarah also quotes Yahya b. Ma'in as saying about him, "He is worthless in hadith, though was a person of sunnah (*Sahib Sunnah*)."³⁴

It should be noted that Yahya also has several instances where he praised Nu'aym, as well as several other instances where he pointed out various mistakes of Nu'aym, even once in Nu'aym's presence, all of which can be found in Nu'aym's biographical entry in Tahdhib Al-Kamal.

Al-Nasa'i is another hadith critic who praised him for his knowledge but expressly stated that he was weak and may not be used as an evidence.³⁵

³¹ Ibid

³² Tahdhib Al-Kamal (29/475)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Tahdhib Al-Kamal (29/476)

Section C - Hadith Critics and Hadith in Support of their Biases

The last angle through which we will consider this issue is how hadith critics treated hadith reports in support of their biases. The following four examples all relate to theological biases.

Al-Duri relates that Yahya b. Ma'in mentioned a specific transmitter and said about him:

He transmitted an *objectionable* (munkar) hadith from 'Ali b. Thabit from Isra'il from Ibn Abi Layla from Nafi' from Ibn 'Umar who said: The Prophet said, "Two groups who have no claim to Islam: The Murji'ah and the Qadariyyah."³⁶

In our first example, Yahya b. Ma'in rejects this hadith that strongly criticizes and rebukes his theological opponents: the murji'ah and qadariyyah. Yahya's opposition to the Qadariyyah has preceded in Section B. With regards to the Murji'ah, Yahya is opposed to them as he explicitly states, in opposition to them, "Belief is speech and actions; it increases and decreases."³⁷ Furthermore, he seems to have a quite unfavorable view of them, as he quotes Shareek saying about the Murji'ah, "The Murji'ah are the enemies of Allah."³⁸ Yahya doesn't comment on Shareek's statement.

In his compilation on defective hadith, Ibn Abi Hatim posed the following question to his father Abu Hatim Al-Razi:

³⁶ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (4/385)

³⁷ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Al-Duri (4/391)

³⁸ Tarikh Ibn Ma'in - Riwayah Ibn Muhriz (1/165)

I asked my father about a hadith transmitted by Baqiyyah from Habib b. 'Umar from his father from Ibn 'Umar from 'Umar from the Messenger of Allah that he said, "An announcer will announce on the Day of Resurrection, 'Let the opponents of Allah stand' and they are the Qadariyyah?" He replied, "This hadith is objectionable (munkar); Habib b. 'Umar is weak in hadith; unknown; none except Baqiyyah transmit from."³⁹

If we look at the hadith Abu Hatim is questioned about all we see is a hadith discussing the happenings of the day of judgment, a well-known genre in hadith that in principle Abu Hatim has no qualms of authenticating. Furthermore, the hadith is in essence strongly rebuking the qadariyyah, a group Abu Hatim was in opposition to and considered heretical. Indeed, Abu Hatim and Abu Zur'ah both dictated to Ibn Abi Hatim in their text that became known as "*Aqidah Al-Raziyyayn*," "And the heretical Qadariyyah are misguiders."⁴⁰ Yet, in sticking to his hadith principles, he rejected the hadith due to Habib b. 'Umar, and didn't let the acceptability of the genre to himself or the contents in support of his biases against the qadariyyah affect his decision.

Abu Hatim was also asked about another hadith that reads, "Every Nation has a Majus and the Majus of my Nation are the Qadariyyah. If they get sick, don't visit them and if they die, don't pray over them." He replied, "This hadith is false."⁴¹ In this second hadith Abu Hatim is asked about, note that the hadith support his biases against the qadariyyah. Furthermore, the hadith belongs to the *Dala'il Al-Nubuwwah* (Proofs of Prophethood) genre, as it foretells the existence of a heretical group known as the "qadariyyah." Instead of accepting this hadith that falls in line with his bias, and hailing it as a miracle, due to the Prophet allegedly foretelling the

³⁹ 'Ilal Ibn Abi Hatim (6/621-622)

⁴⁰ Sharh Usul l'tiqad Ahl Al-Sunnah Wal Jama'ah (1/197)

⁴¹ Al-Jarh Wal Ta'di (7/52)

Qadariyyah, he rejects the hadith report in accordance with his hadith principles.

When Abu Zur'ah was asked about the hadith, "The discourse of the Qadariyyah is disbelief," he replied, "This is false in my opinion.⁴²" The same that was said about Abu Hatim, may also be said about Abu Zur'ah as well. He has no qualms with the genre of prophecies, of which this hadith is from, and there is no love lost between him and the qadariyyah; his and Abu Hatim's express statements on the qadariyyah have already been mentioned.

In the four hadith examples presented, we observed that the rulings of the hadith critics on these reports were informed by their hadith principles, as opposed and in spite of their biases.

While the Hadith Critics mentioned here were clearly not without strong opinions on issues and biases, through the examples given, their objective application of hadith method became apparent. When it came down to it, even though a transmitter was from a competing and opposing theological group, the Hadith Critic didn't allow this to impair his judgment on the reliability of the transmitter. On the flip side of the coin, if one of their theological brethren was worthy of being criticized, their shared theological ascriptions and biases didn't lead them to overlook the obvious problems in said transmitters. Additionally, as observed in the preceding examples, their theological biases didn't cloud their judgment on hadith reports in express support of those same theological biases.

⁴² Su'alat Al-Bardha'i (2/325)

Chapter Four: Sincerity and Honesty of Hadith Critics

Moving on from the objectivity of Hadith Critics, we will take a look at something of equal importance: the sincerity and honesty of Hadith Critics. Were the hadith Critics sincere to the field of hadith? Did they uphold the integrity of the hadith field? Were they honest in contributing to the field? Or was their personal resume and fame as Critics more important than the field of hadith?

In this chapter, we will observe two practices which are indicative of their sincerity and honesty to the field of hadith. The first practice will show the Critics opting for honesty in a scenario where they could have increased their personal hadith resume and claimed more teachers than they really had. The second practice will show that when faced with a question they didn't know the answer to, they would let the questioner know, as opposed to making up information.

Section A - First Practice

While reading through Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib by Ibn Hajar, I began to notice a recurring theme among several hadith critics. Essentially, a critic would mention a hadith transmitter - either as an answer to a question or by their own accord - and while affirming the transmitter's reliability, they would also admit that either he never met the other transmitter, or if he did, that he never acquired hadith from him directly. The only viable explanation for a critic doing this (i.e deny learning from a transmitter who is otherwise sought out due to their reliability) is honesty. These critics were not willing to sacrifice their honesty, not the integrity of their field to increase their teachers and bolster their hadith resumes. Let's consider a few examples.

1. Abul-Azhar said about himself, "I saw Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah but he didn't transmit to me."⁴³

Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah is a famous authority, whom a connection with would be a source of pride and honor for a hadith transmitter like himself. Yet, Abul-Azhar admits that, even though he met Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah, he never actually acquired any hadith from him.

2. Abu Zur'ah Al-Razi said about Ahmed b. Ishkab, "A person of hadith (*Sahib Hadith*), I had the chance to meet him (*adraktuh*), but I didn't write from him."⁴⁴

Ahmed b. Ishkab's reliability is unanimously endorsed and his own colleague and partner Abu Hatim Al-Razi, as well as Al-Bukhari and others are counted amongst his students who acquired hadith from him. In this case, not only is Abu Zur'ah admitting not have taken from a transmitter

⁴³ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (1/15)

⁴⁴ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (1/16)

though it would have been possible to take from him, it is a transmitter that his other contemporaries are acquainted with and have taken from.

3. Ibn Abi Hatim said about Ahmed b. Harb Al-Mawsili, "I had the chance to meet him (*adraktuh*) but I didn't write from him; and he was truthful.⁴⁵"

In this case, Ibn Abi Hatim is endorsing the honesty of a transmitter from the students of Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah and Abu Mu'awiyah, whom he possibly could have taken from but did not. Sufyan, as stated before is an authority and Abu Mu'awiyah is one of the more important transmitters from Al-A'mash.

4. Abu Hatim Al-Razi said about Ahmed b. 'Abdir-Rahman b. Bakkar Al-Dimashqi, "I saw him transmitting but I didn't write from him and he was truthful.⁴⁶"

In this case, Abu Hatim Al-Razi endorses a transmitter whom he met and had a chance to acquire hadith from, yet he never actually wrote from him as he stated.

5. Abu Dawud (d. 277) said about Ahmed Al-Khallal, "Reliable; I didn't hear from him.⁴⁷"

Once again, another hadith critic, this time Abu Dawud, the author of the *Sunan* compilation affirms the reliability of the transmitter at hand, yet admits not acquiring hadith from him.

6. Al-'Ijli said about Habban b. Hilal Al-Bahili, "Reliable. I didn't hear from him; he was difficult.⁴⁸"

⁴⁵ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (1/19)

⁴⁶ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (1/33)

⁴⁷ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (1/27)

In this quote, Al-'Ijli affirms the reliability of a transmitter and then negates acquiring hadith from him while pointing out that he used to give students a hard time. This last point is interesting, as I imagine acquiring hadith from a transmitter who was known to be difficult would be a resume booster. Furthermore, lying about such an incident would be relatively easy to get away with. If the transmitter is so difficult how many students does he actually have who could deny Al-'Ijli's presence in the hadith sittings?

7. Abul-Walid Al-Tayalisi said about Harb b. Surayj, "He was our neighbor; there is no problem with him but I didn't hear from him."⁴⁹

Abul-Walid Al-Tayalisi affirms the reliability of the transmitter, yet denies acquiring hadith from him, despite the fact that they are neighbors.

Section B - Second Practice

A noticeable theme throughout the books on transmitters of hadith is that the hadith critics are not shy to express uncertainty about or ignorance of a hadith or a particular transmitter of hadith. To quote examples of this would be a disservice, as there are hundreds of examples. Suffice it to say that because of their honesty in expressing their ignorance on who transmitters may be, a special term was even developed to accommodate this practice. Transmitters that are unknown are termed as *Majhul* by later hadith critics and writers.

Yet, if the critics were dishonest and their rulings arbitrary, why not simply fabricate information about the transmitter? In fact, this would be a

⁴⁸ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (2/170)

⁴⁹ Tahdhib Al-Tahdhib (2/224)

perfect way to show superiority over another hadith critic. One could claim exclusive information on a transmitter, to the exclusion of the other critics, further boosting his hadith credibility. But, as noted, this does not happen and the hadith critics preferred the integrity of the field of hadith to any personal gains to be gotten by feigning knowledge or falsely increasing the number of their teachers.

Conclusion

In the first chapter, we discussed erroneous judgments by hadith critics rulings motivated by their own personal biases. While no one disagrees on the occurrence of these types of errors, two important points were made. Firstly, that these occurrences were not “news” to the hadith, nor were they taken surprised by it. They recognized its existence in theory and in practice they were careful to point it out when it did occur. Secondly, that these mistakes were the exception and not the rule, as proven by the discussion on objectivity in the third chapter.

In the second chapter, a brief synopsis was given on the most important methods used by hadith critics in determining the reliability of transmitters. How these methods were applied and the implications of these results from the methods were observed through various theoretical and practical examples. The takeaway from this chapter was to demonstrate the rationale behind the methods used by hadith critics in judging transmitters. It is based on rational and historical principles not subjective and arbitrary ideals.

In the third chapter, the objectivity of the hadith critics in applying their principles on judging transmitters was looked into from three different angles. The first angle was to show how the hadith critics dealt with transmitters of opposing theology. The second angle was to show how the hadith critics dealt with transmitters of their theological leanings. The last angle was to show how the hadith critics dealt with hadith reports that expressly support their biases. Through each of these angles, it was demonstrated that the hadith critics were very objective in their application of principles. Weakness was not overlooked due to brotherhood, nor was reliability ignored due to opposing theological views

and the appeal of certain hadith reports due to their express support of their ideological biases did not impair their judgment on its authenticity.

In the fourth and last chapter, several examples from a wide array of hadith critics were surveyed and points indicative of their honesty and sincerity were highlighted. Throughout the examples discussed, we saw the hadith critics sacrifice personal gain on their hadith resumes to preserve and maintain the integrity of the field of hadith.